

WASHINGTON, D.C. - A comprehensive national ocean governance bill written by Congressman Sam Farr (D-Carmel) was approved Wednesday afternoon by a House subcommittee. The bill's next stop will be before the full Committee on Natural Resources, the final step before a vote by the full House of Representatives.

"I'm excited that this bill has taken the first big step toward passage," Rep. Farr said following the vote. "We have the laws and agencies to safeguard our oceans, but we have no framework for them to function. That means our laws often intersect and our agencies are left with overlapping guidelines. This bill will provide the regional partnerships and framework for our ocean laws to properly function."

"The seeds of this legislation grew out of the National Oceans Conference in Monterey, 10 years ago this June," Rep. Farr said. "All my years on the Central Coast have taught me how important our waters are. For too long we have ignored our oceans, allowing competing interests to destroy fragile ecosystems. This bill has kick-started a conversation in Washington about our role as ocean caretaker, and I'm very proud of that."

The legislation, officially known as the "Ocean Conservation, Education, & National Strategy for the 21st Century Act," is a bipartisan product of a decade of effort. It is based on recommendations from the Pew Oceans Commission and the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy and has strong support from both Democrats and Republicans. The House bill has 66 cosponsors. It has not yet been introduced in the Senate.

The legislation will:

- Consolidate national management of the oceans and create a system of regional committees promoting ecosystem governance;
- Codify the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration into law (the agency has no basis in law and has no formal mission, even though its roots extend to the 1800s);
- Create an ocean advisor in president's cabinet;
- Create regional and national ocean advisory committees to address competing priorities and emerging issues;
- Coordinate federal and state agencies (U.S. waters are governed by 140 laws and 20 agencies, often resulting in havoc);
- Create an Oceans and Great Lakes Conservation Trust Fund to fund regional governance

initiatives.

The 11-3 vote took place in the Subcommittee on Fisheries, Wildlife and Oceans, part of the House Committee on Natural Resources.

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